

Not of the World,

THOUGHTS ON CHRISTIAN CASUISTRY.

MANUSON IQUARE CHURCH, NEW YORK CITY.

LOTE IS THE BEST CASUIST. VINET.

PUBLISHED BY THE American Tract Society,

100 NASSAU-STREET,
NEW YORK.



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THOUGHTS ON CHRISTIAN CASUISTRY.

BY

WILLIAM ADAMS, D. D.

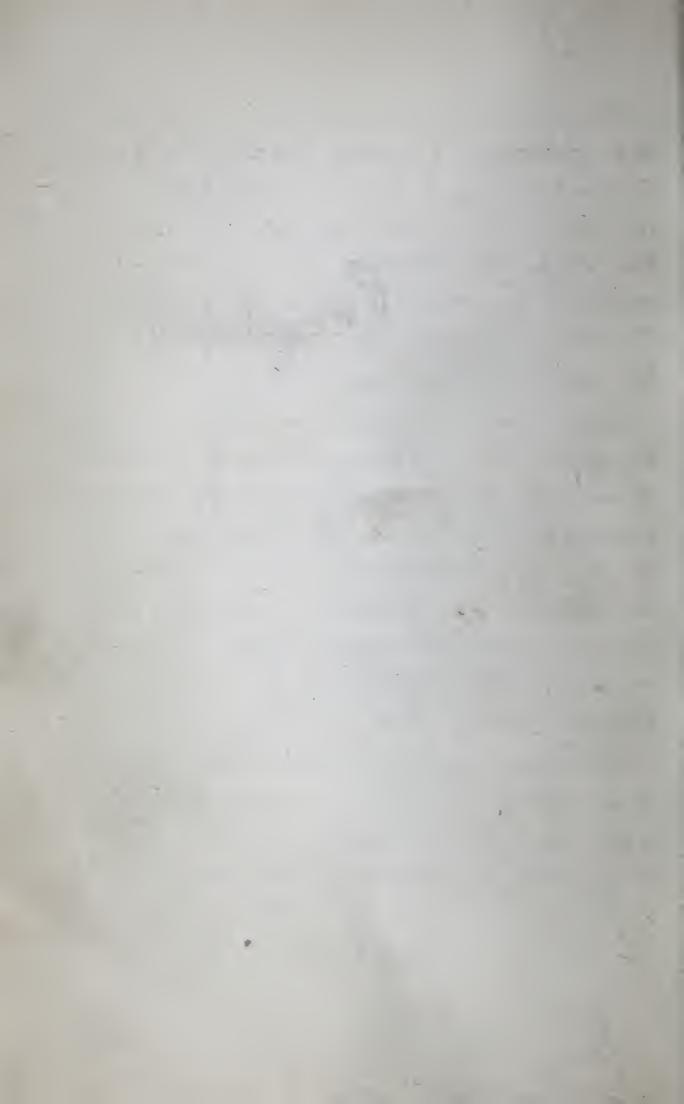
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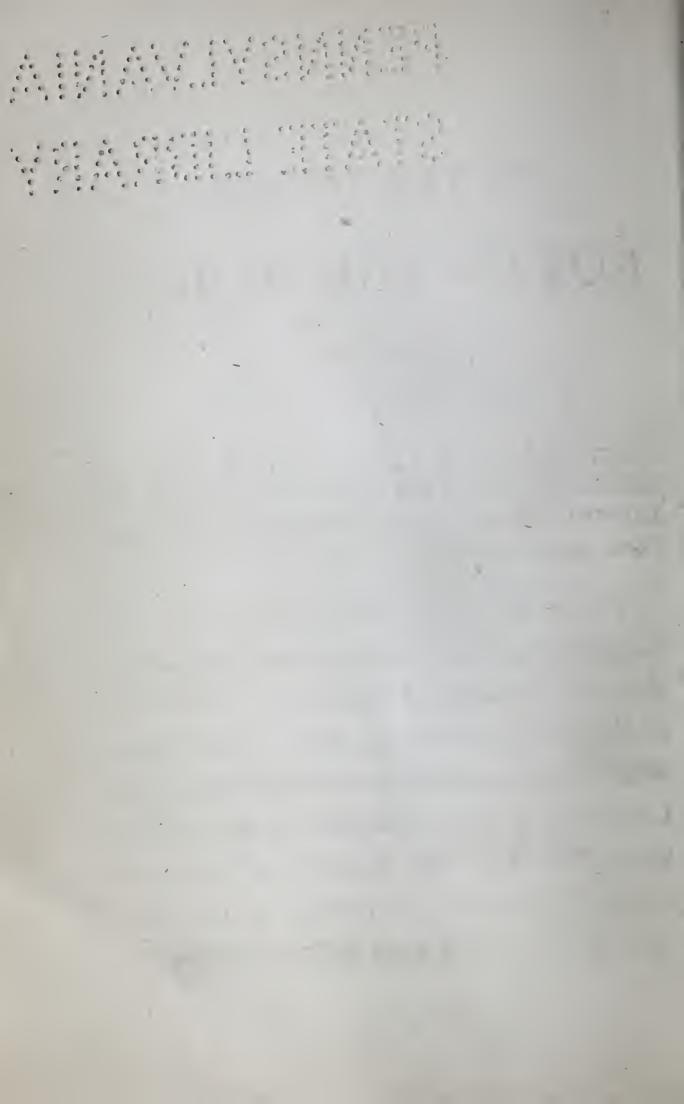
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Should it occur to any reader that there is a repetition of the same sentiments in some of the following pages, an explanation may be found in the fact that the substance of the whole was originally delivered from the pulpit in the form of pastoral discourses on different occasions—the one necessarily referring to and involving the other.

Some whose judgment he is accustomed to respect, having expressed the opinion that these addresses might be published with a prospect of usefulness, the author has given them in their original form. Had he undertaken in the first instance to prepare a treatise on the same subject for the press, he would probably have aimed at a more compact and orderly arrangement

The writer will be abundantly compensated if any thing contained in these pages may help one youthful Christian to lead a more thoughtful, cheerful, and useful life.



#### IN THE WORLD,

### NOT OF THE WORLD.

#### I.

ALL THINGS ARE LAWFUL FOR ME, BUT ALL THINGS ARE NOT EXPEDIENT: ALL THINGS ARE LAWFUL FOR ME, BUT ALL THINGS EDIFY NOT. 1 Cor. 10:23.

There is nothing in all literature more suggestive, entertaining, and instructive than the history of casuistry. The root of this word is casus, a case; and in general usage, it refers to cases of conscience. Casuistry is the doctrine of cases of conscience. It is the science of resolving cases of doubtful propriety, or of determining the lawfulness or unlawfulness of

what a man may do, according to certain rules. Kant calls casuistry the "dialectics of conscience."

It is implied in the right use of the word, that there may be some difficulties in the way of ascertaining what is right in particular cases; a collision between things which are opposite, when the question is, which of them is the right. Of some things the right and wrong are known immediately and unquestionably. They are forbidden by nature. They are prohibited in Scripture, in so many words. "Thou shalt not kill;" "Thou shalt not commit adultery;" "Thou shalt not steal," says the law of God. Many are the things enjoined, many are the things forbidden in the holy Scriptures in terms so definite and palpable that, in regard to them, there can be no question whatever as to what is right and proper. All the

weight is on one side. Nothing is to be said or thought of upon the other.

The number of such specific acts is limited. There are many others concerning which much may be said on both sides. The question is raised and revolved which of conflicting ways is most in accordance with religious duty. The Christian casuist is a moralist who endeavors to solve such doubtful questions in accordance with Scripture.

The canon of sacred Scripture was not complete before many questions of casuistry were raised by Christian believers. One of them was discussed by the apostle Paul, in the first epistle to the Corinthian Christians. The question had been raised, and it was referred to the apostle for decision, "whether it was right for Christians to partake of the meat which had been offered in sacrifice to idols." It seems that only a part of

the animals presented in idolatrous sacrifices was consumed on the altar; the principal part, being still the property of him who offered it, was either taken to his own house, to be used as food upon his own table, or exposed for sale in the market, in the same way as any other meat. The conscientious Christian, desirous of doing nothing wrong, raised the question whether, when he was invited to the table of his heathen neighbors, or went to market to buy his food, it would be right for him to use this particular article; whether, if he did, it would not imply a certain sanction of idolatry. This is an example of casuistry. The space allotted to the discussion of this particular question—the amount of arguments presented in the decision of the apostle—is a most interesting and instructive chapter in Christian ethics.

In the epistle to the Romans we find that the same apostle had occasion to treat of other questions belonging to the same general class. Diversities of opinion prevailed among the members of the same church, all equally conscientious, it would seem, in regard to articles of food and drink and observance of days, and many other things which very naturally perplexed those who had been educated under a religious system which consisted in good part of a scrupulous conformity to ritualistic distinctions.

Such questions of doubtful propriety are sure to arise in all times and in all stages of society. At first, cases of conscience arose among those who appear to have been honest in their wish and intention to do right and avoid what was wrong. Had it been otherwise, they would have been dismissed abruptly from his presence by the apostle, and

their questions dispatched by a summary process.

Time advanced, and a new chapter in the history of casuistry was opened. This was nothing better than special pleading in advocacy of acts and customs which were condemned by the conscience. Its object was to furnish reasons and excuses for acts and omissions which are known to be wrong, so that they might appear to be right. Bold infidelity needs and practises no casuistry. It is indifferent to all moral distinctions. All colors are the same in the dark. He who recognizes no Being higher than himself, and no law greater than his own will, is disturbed by no scruples, but rushes, as the swine to the pool of mire, headstrong in the way of his own unregulated passions. The number of such is limited. Most are inclined to invent reasons for what they do which

will palliate and justify. They are not ready to shut their eyes blindly to all distinctions between right and wrong, and so they seek for arguments and apologies, when doing wrong, which will ease the conscience in the name of religion. They wish to be known as religionists, and so casuistry is set to work to provide rules and maxims which will justify the wrong, and at the same time allow them to retain the name and the status of a Christian. The institution of the confessional and the claim of priestly absolution came in to aid this form of casuistry, and give it an inevitable growth. Under these foster-parents, it has "vibrated between the extremes of impracticable severity and contemptible indulgence."\* No one who has not read the works of the most eminent casuists

<sup>\*</sup> Sir James McIntosh, History of Eng., vol. 2, p. 359.

in the papal church can form an idea of the ingenuity and sophistry which they display in the solution of cases of conscience.

The design of Pascal, in his "Provincial Letters," was to expose to deserved ridicule all those acts and tricks of casuistry which have for ever associated the name of Jesuit with cunning and deceit. The tremendous satire of this immortal book is made sharp and brilliant as steel by the simple rehearsal of facts. The French have a word in their language—escobarderie—the synonym of artful duplicity, which is derived from Escobar, a Spanish monk, one of the most renowned of all the casuists of the Roman church. His works amount to six large volumes; and they contain a justification of every crime committed among mankind.

Bribery, judicial bribery, is disposed

of in this manner: "Justice is a debt which the judge owes, and therefore he cannot sell it; but he cannot be said to owe injustice, and therefore he may lawfully receive money for it."\* Usury is justified by this subtlety of words: "It would be downright usury to take unlawful interest from the borrower, if we should exact it as due in point of justice; but to exact it as due in point of gratitude—to claim it through the medium of the benevolence of the borrower—is not usury." As to duelling, the matter is put in these terms: "There is no moral evil surely in one stepping into a field, or in taking a stroll in expectation of meeting a person, and surely none in defending one's self in the event of being attacked."+

A convert might worship idols openly in a heathen temple, so says this author,

<sup>\*</sup> Pascal, p. 124.

<sup>†</sup> Ibid., p. 98.

provided he had an image of Jesus Christ concealed under his clothes.

This will serve to illustrate the province of casuistry as practised at one time by high authorities. It was a most obliging and accommodating conduct, stretching out a hand to all mankind, and by most ingenious tricks of words and logic, designed to make the worse appear the better reason.

We close the pages of this extraordinary history; but we cannot say that such casuistry has altogether disappeared from the world. It may not indeed be practised and advocated in the same open manner by doctors of the church as it was two or three centuries ago. Many, it is to be feared, play deceit with their consciences by inventing plausible excuses for what in all honesty they know to be wrong.

Dismissing such acts and ingenuities

of the old casuistry, we encounter another form of it, which we are bound to believe is honest.

Many Christian people, intending to be such, are perplexed at times as to the propriety of engaging in certain acts and customs. They inquire, and they are honest in the inquiry, whether such things are consistent with a Christian profession. They do not wish to be furnished, after the old method, with excuses for doing wrong; they ask for help in deciding what is wrong. They crave guidance in regard to what is of doubtful propriety. Any pastor who has to any degree the respect and confidence of his people could testify how often he is consulted in regard to the propriety of particular things on the part of Christian believers.

The mention of such words as cards, opera, dancing, theatre, will immediately

suggest that large class of subjects in regard to which there is a diversity of practice and opinion throughout Christendom. If such things were prohibited totidem verbis in the New Testament, that would be an end of the whole matter. By the terms of the case, no such interdict exists, and the inquiry is, Who shall decide, when the question is raised as to the propriety of all matters occupying a debatable ground? If the matter could be dispatched by a father confessor, who should decide and permit and sanction after the old method, that would be one way out of the perplexity. This would bring us out on the ground of probability as held by the Jesuits; which was, that any opinion or custom was lawful, if it was permitted by any one doctor of eminence, even though it was contrary to the conscience of the individual himself; according to

which no custom was reprehensible, inasmuch as every practice is advocated by at least some one authority; and a "single doctor may thus turn consciences round about and upside down as he pleases, yet always land them in a safe position." What we need is not a human prescription; not permission or absolution from man however eminent, much less jugglery, legerdemain, or mechanical propulsion. We ask for laws written in living souls; for high and eternal principles, which will lift Christian believers far above debate and doubtfulness, supplying an automatic force independent of all the influences of custom and fashion.

Bear in mind then, that it is for a Christian rule that we now inquire. We dismiss for the time being every other consideration, and ask for a rule of con-

<sup>\*</sup> Pascal, p. 68.

duct which is distinctively *Christian*. We are to show what is the law of *Christ*, as distinct from all other laws, in regard to all such matters.

Let it be kept in mind also, that it is of things indifferent we are to treat. By this word of the old philosophers we mean things neither good nor bad in themselves. Calvin calls them things "intermediate." Theft, murder, fraud, perjury, falsehood, are pure, unmixed, and unqualified evil. They are bad, and only bad; bad throughout, and bad always. In regard to such matters there can be no debate by a human conscience regulated by the divine law. It is of things adiaphoristic, that is, things which, in themselves and by themselves, are not positively and obviously wicked; things therefore open to debate: it is of such things that we now treat, as constituting that ground for the play

of casuistry with which in our times we are most familiar.

It is at this point that the example and reasoning of the apostle come in for our instruction. Here it is that we turn to his own words in reference to a question of casuistry, and these deserve a careful and accurate interpretation.

The first thing asserted by the apostle is, the Christian law of liberty; the assertion of his individual rights; the lawfulness of exercising his own free and independent judgment. This is expressed in the words, "All things are lawful for me." 1 Cor. 10:23. Observe, the "all things" here mentioned are of the class already defined not necessarily sinful in themselves, and therefore not proscribed by specific statutes. Thus in reference to the particular case referred to the apostle for decision, the eating of the meat of animals offered in heathen

sacrifices, in the thing itself there was no evil. To him an idol was "no thing in the world," just nothing at all; an illusion, a fiction; and it was right for him to treat it as such. He had no scruples of conscience in certain cases mentioned by himself, as to using this article of food. If it was good meat, and suitable for nutrition, then it was lawful for him to use it; no man had a right to question or restrict his liberty of judgment in such a case. No man may insist on making his own conscience a law for all other consciences. As he may not make his own person a measure for the garments of other people; so may he not enjoin his own opinions and wishes as a rule for his fellow-Christians. "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant?" Over and over the apostle sets forth this law of Christian liberty. He would inculcate and exemplify a magnanimity superior to all the narrow scruples of Judaism. Christianity does not imprison a man within palisades of petty restrictions, made up of a thousand reiterations of "thou shalt" and "thou shalt not;" it introduces one out of the bondage of corruption into "the glorious liberty of the sons of God."

Now the tendency always has been to misuse this law of liberty, and run it into license. Following the argument of the apostle, it appears that the Corinthians wished and attempted to include in the category of liberty things known to be unlawful, even that very sin which has given historic infamy to their own city. On this perversion of his words, the apostle frowns with indignation. The punishment which befell the rebellious Jews for joining in heathen offerings was a warning for all men in all times not to indulge in any thing which is known to

be sinful. With this distinction clear and fast in the mind between things sinful and things not in themselves necessarily so, inspiration asserts the largest freedom. "Why is my liberty judged of another man's conscience?" and what right has my neighbor to impose his scruples upon me for a law? "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof." As his child, I am an heir of all things, and may go in and out of his fold, and find ample range and pasture.

But this lawfulness and this liberty are not the whole of the Christian life. The hemispheres must be balanced. Liberty itself is encompassed and pervaded by another law. To say that personal liberty is restrained, might sound like a solecism; but nevertheless it is true—none the less true, because the restraint is nothing but *Christian love*.

This second, and highest of all rules,

is set forth in the second member of the apostolical rule, "but all things are not expedient." The meaning of which is, that as a Christian, it may not be right and good that one should do all which is in itself lawful. The peculiarity of a Christian soul is, that it is pervaded by true love for others, and therefore the tendency of what he does is considered in the exercise of his liberty. Selfgratification is not the supreme law of a Christian believer. Let us keep to the point, that in the solution of all questions of casuistry, we are looking for a Christian principle. If it were otherwise—if we were discussing matters from the worldly point of view—to show that any thing was lawful would be sufficient. If the question were only what may be for my amusement, what for my pleasure, then the law of liberty would be the only force.

Just here is the point of divergence between the man of the world and the disciple of Jesus Christ. In search of a law which is distinctively Christian, we find this unquestionably, unequivocally, universally, to be the characteristic of the religion of Jesus Christ, that it animates us with a peculiar love to our fellow-men. It was love for man, love of a peculiar quality and degree, which brought the Son of God into the world to redeem the lost. That love, with all its peculiarities of quality, self-sacrificing for the benefit of others, is the distinctive feature of the Christian man. It lifts the disciple up to the side of his Master by a living sympathy.

The believer in Christ does not ask first of all, chief of all, what is lawful for me to do? wherein may I please myself? what is for my good? but expressly this: How may I benefit and

bless others? and therefore, what is the tendency of what I do upon others? Christ pleased not himself; and though it be true that between this divine model and ourselves there is a space wide as that which divides the stars from the earth, yet must we ever keep in our eye the loftiness of the rule and the perfection of that ideal which are found not in the world, but in Him only who redeems the world. Here is the chasm which lies between man and Christ: the world, its fashions and lusts, and the world's Redeemer. Love is the law of the Christian life. It encompasses and vitalizes all other laws. There is no liberty in Christ's house to do any thing which may offend or harm a human soul. It is not enough to know what is "lawful;" I must ask what is "expedient," what "edifies," what profits others. If I insist only upon my right and my liberty, then

I am nothing but a worldling—a man under the dominion of his natural will and instincts, and nothing more. If I wish to be in sympathy with Jesus Christ, my first inquiry will be, what contributes most to the benefit of others? It is lawful, in my liberty, to eat any kind of wholesome meat which I find in the market; so reasons the apostle; but if I find that others are entangled and embarrassed by what I do, and their weak consciences are wounded, and they are misled into idolatry itself, then I will forego my liberty, and rather than sin against the welfare of others, and bring others into harm, "I will eat no meat while the world standeth."

To say that others have no right to be weak and prejudiced and narrow-minded, does not relieve the matter with a noble Christian soul. He may have knowledge; but love is greater than

knowledge. He may have magnanimity; but to hurt a weak soul for which Christ died—in the words of the apostle, to cause it to "perish" through the use of our liberty—from this the disciple of Christ shrinks with a quick and sensitive instinct.

It would seem from the scripture before us, that if any one rise to the high
position of sympathetic love with Christ
in the redemption of men, to which
all Christian believers are invited and
summoned, he will make an easy solution of a thousand questions which perplex others when floundering in the
bogs which lie midway on the debatable
ground between the world and Christ.

Turn to the closing part of the ninth chapter of this epistle to the Corinthians, and you find the apostle declaring himself as one who became all things to all men; accommodating himself, in his lib-

erty and largeness of soul, like self-adjusting machinery; but for what? "That I might by all means save some." This was the end always in his eye. Never once did he lose sight of this great object of his Christian love. This accommodating himself in things indifferent was not for his own ends, to gain any thing for himself; had it been, it would have been contemptible; but it was the self-same motive which glowed in the soul of Jesus Christ, to bless and save mankind. The world is always demanding conformity to itself. Always is the world tempting the Christian man down on to its own ground, ingeniously suggesting that conforming to its laws and ways may be a happy means of winning its confidence. Custom pleads exemption. Self asks for indulgence. Fashion asserts her laws. But all observation and experience prove that when conversions are made from such

motives, the conversion is on the wrong side. "They are not of the world," says the holy Son of God of his disciples, "even as I am not of the world." And the object of every *Christian* man should be to stand on such a high elevation by the side of his Lord that he may never for a moment be diverted from the great purpose and ambition of love, to save the world.

To reach this high standing-place of faith and love is no easy and spontaneous thing. It requires toil and effort and careful keeping of the heart to acquire this victory. And it is in this connection that the Christian apostle, in the last verses of the ninth chapter of that epistle to which we have referred, introduces that memorable passage concerning his strenuous efforts in striving for the mastery over his own body; as if he were wielding the cestus, and bruising

and beating down his worldly self into subjection to the higher law of Christ and his love. He practised no false asceticism, nevertheless he put restraint upon the liberty of the flesh; he aimed to conquer the world, so that he might use it, and not be conquered by the world, and so be a slave, when heaven challenged him to be a master and a victor.

It was because he was so successful in the degree and quality of his Christian love, always inquiring how he could most edify and bless others, that this representative of the Christian life was so joyous and jubilant in his own soul. You have heard many charges alleged against the Christian faith, upon the ground of its sourness and repulsiveness, and so the world challenges the Christian to put on her smiles and gayety, thus to make religion seem attract-

ive. We have no apologies to make for the mistakes of any who are good; but we meet such an accusation as this with a downright denial.

There is nothing repulsive in true Christian love. There cannot be, any more than darkness in the sun. Superstition may be unlovely; fanaticism may be, and is, malign; bigotry may be sour; hypocrisy may assume a sad and disfigured countenance; but love such as Jesus Christ inspires in the soul is full of delight. The joy of the Lord is our strength. It gives buoyancy to the step, vigor to the bones, tone to the health, cheerfulness to the face, sweetness to the manners, persuasiveness to the voice, and a radiance to the whole life. It is your half-hearted, compromising, diluted religion which gives a false testimony; but the quality of love which Christ enkindles in a true disciple is a

light which shines, and so, as Christ has said, persuades others to glorify its divine source and parentage.

Nor is this the half we could say. We do not stand on the defensive in this matter. We confront the man of the world with the direct charge of finding his delight in that which is unsubstantial and evanescent. He spends his strength for that which profiteth not. He is unhappy and discontented. He must be so when away from his Father's home. He suffers more from remorse and from fear than he is willing to admit; so he must have his diversion. Something more than simple and healthful recreation does he need. He is a man of pleasure. He craves something to fill the void in his heart. The theatre sees him; places of amusement always know him; and in the midst of all, he is the one to reproach himself of folly; sighing even amid the pauses of highsounding mirth, with the confession, "I said of laughter, It is mad."

Is not this the honest truth? Have I used exaggerated language? Are there not multitudes who are intent upon such giddy ways, not because they are rational and healthy to body or mind, but because they are needed to divert thought, and supply with a pretended good that place in the soul which never yet has been filled with substantial happiness? The grand thing which Christianity proposes is, to rectify the tastes, the preferences, the desires, the love, and to furnish objects for these always pure, and great, and blessed, and permanent, and divine.

True love, peaceful, joyous, blessed on earth, leads directly to that river of pleasure which is at God's right hand for evermore. Give heart, hand, life to Christ, never forgetting the object of life, the same which Love intended when, incarnate, his advent was made into this world, and doubts and mistakes and casuistries will disappear, as mists before the sun; the true path will be plain to Christian instinct, and the heart and face of the true disciple will shine with the brightness of the expected "fulness of joy" which is in the kingdom of God.

## II.

## CAUTION AGAINST ABUSING THE LAW OF CHRISTIAN LIBERTY.

WHEREFORE, LET HIM THAT THINKETH HE STANDETH, TAKE HEED LEST HE FALL. MY DEARLY BELOVED, FLEE FROM IDOLATRY. I SPEAK AS TO WISE MEN; JUDGE YE WHAT I SAY. 1 Cor. 10:12, 14, 15.

A good and great thing is it for a man to have a few fixed principles by which to inspire, direct, and control his whole life. Specific rules, defining the right and the wrong of every case, numerous and various as the cases themselves which may arise, are at once impossible and undesirable. How simple, how comprehensive, how safe, how blessed those Christian laws which inspiration has given us, applicable to all our actions.

Reference has been made in the preceding chapter to the philosophy of Christian casuistry, as unfolded by the apostle Paul. The question concerning the use by Christian believers of meats from animals which had been offered in heathen sacrifices, he discusses at great length. He devotes to it no less than three whole chapters—the eighth, the ninth, and the tenth of the first epistle to the Corinthians. This might not appear, except on close observation. It might seem at first, that in this space there were several disconnected topics; but a more careful inspection convinces us that what seems to be the introduction here and there of a new and independent subject, is either an illustration or argument bearing on the one topic of Christian casuistry, furnishing a doctrine

relative thereto of universal application.

The first principle asserted by the apostle in regard to all things indifferent, that is, not sinful in themselves, is that of Christian liberty. One man may not make his scruples of conscience a law for all other consciences.

The second principle asserted by the apostle, limiting and encompassing and balancing the first, is that of charity love consulting the benefit of others; so that it was not expedient for him to do many things which, in themselves, were lawful under the law of personal liberty. A regard to the tendency of our acts on the habits and welfare of others, is a primary principle of the Christian life. The liberty of personal judgment is not to be made ultimate and superior. The centripetal force is not to be made the one controlling power. "Let no

man seek his own, but every man another's" benefit. The use of my liberty—not recklessly, not selfishly, but with due regard to its effect on the character and destiny of others—is the distinctive feature of the true Christian.

It is this subject, the restriction of liberty by a voluntary self-denial through love, which we desire further to illustrate and magnify as applicable to all questions of casuistry. It is this topic which forms the warp and woof of the apostolic argument in these three chapters. Some read the argument as if it were only a plea for personal liberty; whereas this is only incidental and subordinate. There is every thing in Christianity to exalt a noble soul above the petty conceits, prejudices, scruples, and whims of the narrow-minded; but after all, this assertion of liberty is something which floats on the surface: that which constitutes

the great body of the waters, the swell and volume of the waves bearing up and bearing on whatever rides upon their surface, is that love which the genuine disciple copies from his Lord, inspiring and controlling all which he does, with a desire not to please himself, "not seeking his own profit, but the profit of many, THAT THEY MAY BE SAVED."

In the further prosecution of this subject, let us first of all consult the structure of the apostle's argument, that we may verify our assertion concerning its unity of object. The argument begins with the eighth chapter; and the substance of this chapter, concerning the partaking of meats offered to idols and assisting at feasts held in honor of idols, is this:

Though for those who are strong in faith—an idol having no existence. being nothing in itself—the question has

no importance, this is not so with all; and the infirmities of the weak must in such a matter be regarded in our own conduct. Christian liberty must not be claimed and exercised in such a manner as to become a stumbling-block to others for whom Christ died. This essential difference between self-assertion and love is struck in the very first verse of the chapter: "Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth." That which helps to build up the spiritual temple, and tends to that salvation of human souls for which Christ came into the world, this it is which is the distinctive characteristic of the Christian man. The last verse of the eighth chapter, "Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend," presents that spirit of self-denial which, in the case of the apostle, was a voluntary restraint upon his liberty for the good of others.

Now begins the ninth chapter, which a cursory reader would say was the introduction of a new subject. So far from this, the whole chapter is a magnifying of this grace of self-denial in a Christian method looking to the advantage of others. First of all, he reiterates his rights and liberties as a Christian and an apostle. Has he not power to eat and drink, in his liberty, what he chooses? One item. Has he not a right to be married as well as Peter? Another item. Has he not a right and claim for full support as a Christian preacher? Another item. Nevertheless he does not stand on his rights, and demand them. He prefers to be controlled by a higher and nobler principle, that of self-denial. And the design of this whole chapter is, to illus-

trate this spirit of self-denial. If it be a digression from his main argument on the question of casuistry submitted to his judgment, it is such a digression as is made by the reflux of a wave of the sea at the coming in of the tide, to gather a new force and acquire a heavier swing. It is here that the apostle avows for himself what is the one paramount motive of his life; as a Christian man, adapting himself to all, that he might save some. This last-named intention was not an occasional, Sabbath-day impulse of piety, but the all-absorbing purpose of his life. Nor did such an exercise of self-denial on his part come to him easily, but as the result of continuous and earnest exertion. So closes the chapter with a reference to the racings and wrestlings and strikings and boxings by which he resolved to defeat his ambitious, worldly self, bringing it down into subjection to

the law of Christian love, that he might be a partaker of the gospel and its saving effects for himself. We have no change of topic as yet. The stream of argument deepens and widens along one and the same channel.

The tenth chapter opens, and we have a new phase of the same subject; and one of amazing power it is. It is no less than a warning as to the tremendous evils which result from the abuse of Christian liberty; a warning which is enforced by lively examples drawn from Hebrew history. In asserting the law of liberty in regard to the use of things not in themselves sinful; in advocating a magnanimity of soul far above all narrow scruples, the apostle did not intend to leave his readers in any doubt as to what he thought concerning the direction in which danger was to be apprehended. The danger was not from denying and

curtailing liberty, but in misusing it. Very little was to be feared from the restriction of personal liberty, but very much from its excess. All the danger was from this quarter. By a reference to the example of the rebellions and rejections of God's ancient people, under a dispensation analogous to and typical of the Christian, the apostle, in the very closest connection with his general topic, warns Christian disciples of the great danger of commerce with idolatry.

This danger he illustrates in a remarkable manner, by referring to the close resemblance which existed, in one particular, between the sacrament of the Lord's supper, and the act of the heathen in eating of meats sacrificed to idols, namely, the union in each case of all those who join in the same act of participation. Allow, says he, that the meat of the sacrificial offering has noth-

ing of evil in itself; that in certain circumstances a Christian may exercise his liberty, and eat of it with no harm to himself or others; yet this is not the full statement of the case; for as eating and drinking at the Lord's table is an act and avowal of communion with Christ, so is it ordinarily received that eating and drinking in heathen temples is an act of communion with idols, and a Christian should have no fellowship with idols or devils.

The result of the whole reasoning is, that as Christians they could not eat the idol feast without partaking of idolatry, and virtually abjuring Jesus Christ. "Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry. I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say." It is a partial view of the case to assert that you have a right and a liberty to act in a particular way yourself; that in itself it is no

sin: the construction put upon the act by others, as implying fellowship with what is evil; the effect of the act as tending to the detriment of others, this should materially affect the judgment of a Christian man, when inquiring as to the propriety of certain courses; for his law is, whether he eats or drinks, or whatsoever he does, to do all to the glory of God; or, to sum up the whole discussion in the very last words of the apostle on the subject, "Not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved." "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ." This is the marrow of the whole subject. It is a complete and satisfactory disposal of the matter. There is no shadow of doubt as to what was the apostle's practice and preference. While on the one hand he unfolded the general and spiritual nature of Christianity as a law of liberty,

in distinction from an overscrupulous and ascetic Judaism, he intended to be understood by the whole drift of his reasoning, his historical illustrations, the consideration of Christian sacraments and heathen feasts, and by his own example of self-subjection, that the only danger to Christian men was, from using their liberty in the wrong direction; even in conforming to heathenism, and verging down into compliances and concessions the whole tendency of which is to dishonor Christ, and ruin the souls for whose salvation he came into the world.

This I believe is the honest interpretation of this whole passage. We have no right to disconnect and isolate particular verses and expressions, setting one at right angles of antagonism to another; but taking the whole argument together, we must show how each illustration and assertion is made to bear in mutual de-

pendence upon one indisputable deduction.

At this point, dropping the office of interpreter, we take the lesson we have found as a practical law of Christian conduct. Questions of casuistry are very frequently raised in a Christian community, as to the propriety or lawfulness of Christian disciples engaging in certain acts and customs. By this time we should be able to state a few general principles for the guidance of those who wish and mean to be known as consistent, useful, and happy Christians.

First in order is this: It is not a sufficient justification of any practice or act, to be able to prove that in itself it is not sinful, and therefore within the category of personal liberty. To do this, and nothing more, does not lift one out

of the plane of selfishness and worldliness. You may say that surely there is no sin in shuffling about certain pieces of paper distinguished by a variety of spots in the shape of hearts and diamonds and spades; or in manipulating bits of ivory with a diversity of marks upon their face. Granted. You may assert that there is nothing wrong in saltatory motions, and these made in accordance with prescribed figures, and in unison with music, any more than in the gambols of young animals in the field, or in the gyrations of birds in the air. Granted. You may satisfy yourself that there is nothing positively sinful in eracting with artistic skill of voice and gesture, accompanied with appropriate scenery and dress, the master-pieces of dramatic poetry. Granted again. When you have satisfied yourself thus far, you are only on the very lowest ethical ground

which can be assumed by a Christian. At the utmost, you have only shown that such matters come within the range of liberty as being in themselves lawful. The question how this liberty should be used by you as a Christian, and on Christian principles, is as yet untouched. Yet this is the essential matter; for we are inquiring now, not for what is worldly, permitted, and lawful, but for what is distinctively *Christian*.

The second rule deducible from this Scripture is this: "The same action may, under some circumstances, be right, and under other circumstances be wrong. It is not always enough therefore, to look at the action as it is in itself, disconnected from its circumstances, or at its effects on ourselves merely; but we must look also at the impression it will make and the effects it will have on others."\*

<sup>\*</sup> Fam. Bible, ad loc.

This distinction is plainly drawn in the twenty-seventh and twenty-eighth verses of this tenth chapter: "If any of them that believe not"-your heathen neighbors—"bid you to their tables, and ye be disposed to go; whatsoever is set before you, eat," even though it be a part of a sacrificial offering, "asking no questions for conscience' sake. But if any man say unto you, 'This is offered in sacrifice unto idols'"—making a point of it, presenting it as a test, and challenging your compliance, then "eat not for his sake that showed it, and for conscience' sake." There are many things which may be done in conceivable circumstances by a high-toned Christian as matters of indifference to him, which in other circumstances, magnified into discriminating fests, and understood as such by all, he would not do to save his right arm or his life.

If this principle had been kept in view, there would not have been so many mistakes in pronouncing upon the conduct of the historic class known as the Puritans. Frivolous persons betray their own ignorance of history when they speak of these men as ridiculous precisians, grim and sour-visaged enemies of all innocent relaxation and recreation. They do not know enough of English annals to recall that the very amusements denounced by this extraordinary generation were understood at the time by all parties as tests of great political and religious principles. When the king issued his "Book of Sports," requiring his subjects to frequent bear-gardens on Sunday, think it not strange that, as a counterblast, the Puritans issued their "self-denying ordinance." When decrees, and examples, and laws went forth from Whitehall for the avowed

purpose of testing the qualities of the people, and the reigning Stuart said, "This is offered in sacrifice to idols; by this shall it be known where lie your sympathies and your allegiance;" then men were not wanting who defied such profanity, and by visage and tone and manner scrupulously their own, in the very spirit of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego on the plains of Dura refusing to worship the golden image which the king had set up, with a bravery and pluck and heroism which cannot be too much admired—as the tap-root of all our liberties-proscribed, condemned, denounced many a game and amusement which in other circumstances would have been regarded as innocent or indifferent. Of subsequent mistakes, of hypocrisies on the part of men who afterwards hung on the skirts of a great political party, it would be out of place at this time to

speak; but the distinction made by the apostle is illustrated by this example from history, which is very often misunderstood.

The principle before us is not obsolete. The distinction between the world and the church, which Christ so early presented to his disciples, is not yet abolished. There is a system of things which passes by the name of worldliness, which is understood as such by the common judgment of mankind; and there is another system of things which passes by the name of godliness, defined as such in the Scriptures; and these are contrary one to another. The friendship of the one is pronounced by Supreme authority as enmity to the other; and the world is perpetually pushing its own customs and requirements over its own line into the province of its opponent, as distinctive tests to which it de-

mands or solicits concession. To make use of the very illustration of the apostle in his argument: As partaking of the Christian sacrament is an act of communion with Christ, and so is understood; and partaking of what we know to be offered to idols is generally regarded as an act of fellowship with idolatry; precisely so, there are many things now, which by general consent are understood as in such a sense belonging to the world, that partaking of them is universally construed as an act of fellowship with the world on its own ground, in compliance with its tests, and in concession to its claims. There is occasion therefore still for the exhortation, "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall;" "flee from idolatry;" "provoke not the Lord to jealousy;" "keep yourself unspotted from the world." It is a perilous thing for a Christian to experiment how far he may go in the use of his liberty without infringing upon what is sinful. It is like trying to show how near he may go to the whirlpool or the rapids and not be carried down to destruction. He is safer in another place.

Last of all, and greatest of all for the conduct of his life, is the distinctive rule of the true Christian, by which he regulates his liberty out of a regard to the best interests of others. It is enough for a man of the world to ask, "What is for my pleasure; what for my profit?" but it is the distinctive feature of a Christian man, in the exercise of the peculiar love which comes from Christ, to seek not his own, but the advantage of others. That which is the centre of his theologic belief, the centre of all his personal hopes and affections, the cross of Jesus Christ—the redemption of the

human race by incarnate love—is also the central motive and force of the Christian's life. By an easy and habitual method he aims always, as a Christian, to ask, "What is the tendency of this or that act on the highest and most sacred interests of my fellow-men?" "Is it in coincidence with the work of Christ, or incongruous and antagonistic thereto?" To forego what in some circumstances is a matter of indifference, when in other circumstances it is known to be mischievous in its tendencies on others, is the habitual rule of a rational, devout, earnest Christian. This self-imposed restraint on his liberty, so far from being a galling constraint, is his own choice and delight; and instead of being classified with repulsive asceticism and smallminded scrupulousness, is the noblest purpose which can animate the human soul. When love like this—love seek-

ing to emancipate men from the power of the world, and introduce them into the belief and hopes of the kingdom of God—love, kindled by sympathy with Jesus Christ as the centre and sum of all things—when this glows in the heart, it will be a safe guide in disposing of all matters of questionable propriety. It will be like a new spiritual sense, having a quick discernment of its own. It acts precisely like genuine modesty in man or woman, which asks not for specific rules and laws, defining what is right or what is wrong, but feels and knows, as by instinct, what is proper and what trespasses upon decorum. It is when this love is gone from the heart, or when it is at a low ebb, and religion is one of outward form, that one is perplexed with questions of casuistry: never when those affections and purposes which are distinctively Christian

are in fervent glow. In the vast majority of cases, when those who bear the name of Christian crave the counsel of others to decide as to the rightfulness of particular acts, their own consciences have rendered a verdict in advance, and in fact they are only seeking an ingenious sanction and apology from others for what they know themselves to be wrong.

The policy, the wisdom, the safety of a Christian is, in such a sense, to be above the world, that he may draw the world up to Christ, and not to occupy a position so low as to lose his power of leverage and be drawn downwards by the world into its own proclivities. It is a plausible conceit on the lips of the worldly, that if Christians will only concede and conform to worldly ways, the world will be convinced how attractive and pleasant religion can be. Facts,

philosophy, Scripture have too much testimony bearing on this point to justify such a method.

The power of Christian testimony resides not in concession, but contrast. Religion must not be diluted, but concentrated. The point to be gained is, to convince the world that Christianity is true, and that the great objects it reveals are substantial. The contrast therefore, in motive, pursuit, affection, and pleasure, between the world and the disciple of Christ, must be made clear, sharp, and bold; otherwise there is no motive by which the world may be induced to change its own ways for those which are better and happier. Every follower of Christ should make the impression, that many things which are of the gravest consequence to a man of the world, are to him of very small account. He does not set his heart upon them. No com-

binations of external circumstances are essential to his blessedness. In this way he disposes very easily and spontaneously of many things which are very important to others. He possesses what is greater and better. It is not through a repulsive and excessive scrupulousness that he foregoes this and that recreation; he has parted with the taste for them. He keeps in the category of indifference what to others is quite essential. A life devoted to God in the best sense, converging to the same end as that proposed by the Redeemer, in acts of Christian usefulness, has in it a luxury giving health to body and mind, which was never dreamed of by those who make worldly amusements their main delight and dependence. There was not an Epicurean sauntering through the corridors and porticoes of Athens, making pleasure the law of life, who was not vastly inferior in the way of positive enjoyment to the sublime delight which glowed in the soul of the apostle Paul, in the consciousness of his Christian aims.

Be sure of this: genuine, pure, Christian love never makes a false impression as to its own blessedness. Sand and shells and dirt may adhere to the gold and the pearl. Of these we should be rid. But true religion is a rectification of the tastes. It is the elevation of the aims and the affections to things heavenly and divine; an elevation of the Christian soul itself to a point so high that it understands precisely what is meant by using the world so as not to abuse it; becoming the world's master, and not its slave; acquiring more and more of independence and superiority and victory over the world, and drawing light and warmth and comfort

and joy unspeakable from Jesus Christ, the world's Maker and Redeemer. Sad, woful is that man's condition who is dependent for his happiness upon any thing in the world, from which he must shortly pass, and which is shortly to be consumed. Blessed is he who makes God his trust, his hope, and his portion for ever.

"Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry." Take the caution which comes to us from the Scriptures against the misuse of your liberty. For your own sake, beware lest, while you think you are standing firm, your foothold be sapped, and you fall. For the sake of others, bound hand and foot already by the fascinations of abounding worldliness, beware lest you mislead, bewilder, and destroy. Offence should be given to none. If wounds are inflicted on any, let it not be on Him

whose heart once bled for our salvation, and whose honor is entrusted to our grateful representation.

"I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say."







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